II. EVALUATION OPTIONS AND SCHEDULE

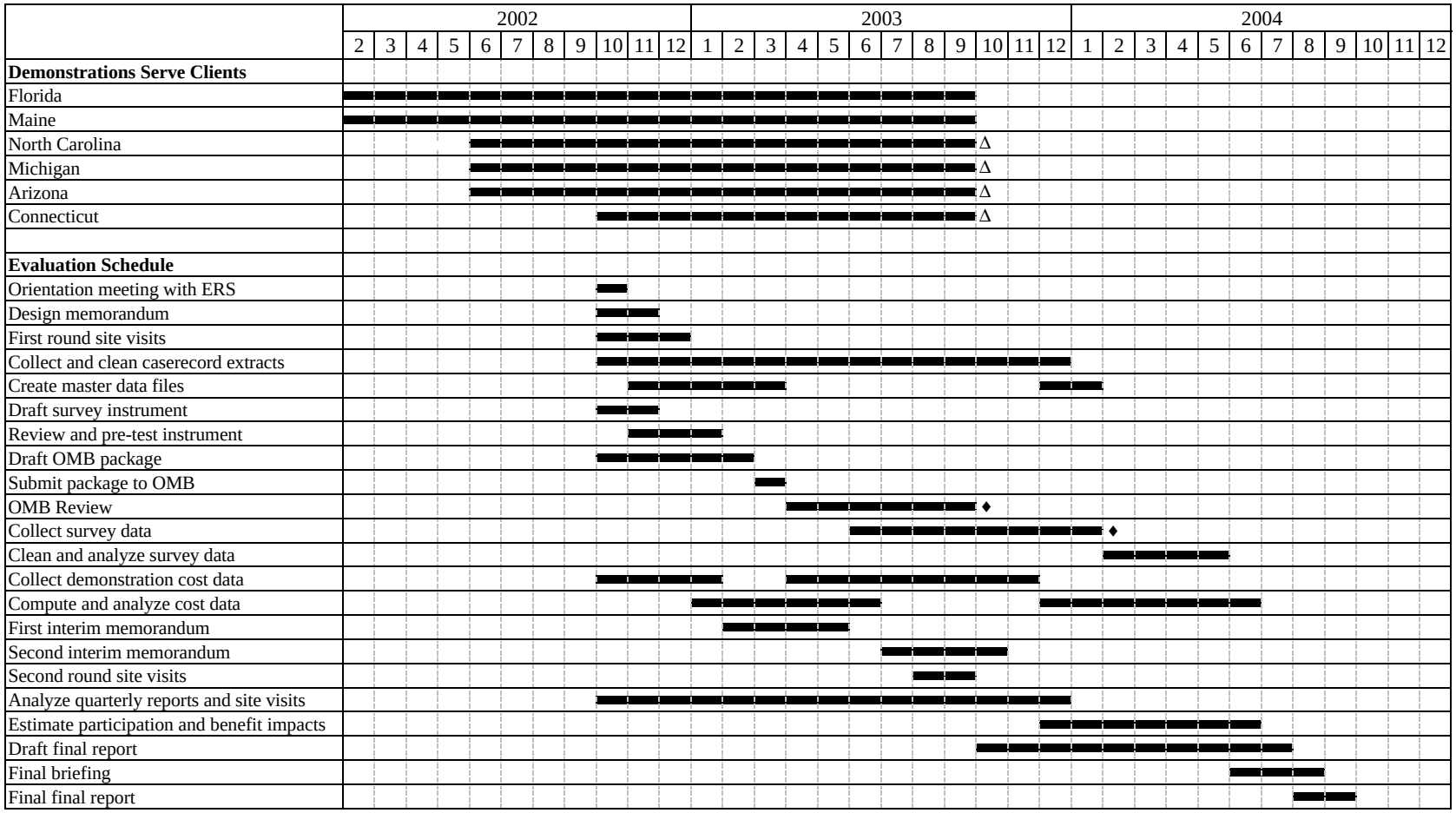
The evaluation of the elderly nutrition demonstrations should be flexible because much about the demonstrations is unknown at the design stage. For instance, as of this writing we do not know the exact month in which four of the six demonstrations will begin serving clients. We also do not know when the demonstrations will end. While the demonstrations are currently scheduled to run through a two-year grant period (which ends in September 2003), they may operate for all or part of a third grant year (which ends in September 2004). Finally, we cannot predict how long the OMB review process, which is required for the client satisfaction surveys and focus groups, will be.

Recognizing these uncertainties and others, in this report we present one evaluation schedule for a two-year grant period (Figure II.1 and Table II.1) and another evaluation schedule for an extended grant period (Figure II.2). For both schedules, we assume that the evaluation will begin in October 2002. We also acknowledge that additional adjustments may be needed to accommodate events such as an unusually long OMB review period or delays in receiving data from some of the demonstrations. In the rest of this chapter we discuss key tasks, the schedules for completing key tasks, and anticipated issues or difficulties for each of the evaluation components:

- Impact on participation and benefits
- Client satisfaction
- Quantifying the costs of the demonstrations
- Implementation experiences and effects of the demonstration on key stakeholders, and
- Meetings, design memorandum, and project management

FIGURE II.1

ELDERLY NUTRITION DEMONSTRATION AND EVALUATION SCHEDULE
TWO-YEAR DEMONSTRATION GRANT



ΔStart date for demonstrations in North Carolina, Michigan, Arizona, and Connecticut are uncertain (as of April 2002).
♦End of OMB review period and start of survey data collection are uncertain (as of April 2002). OMB review typically takes three to six months.

This schedule assumes that the evaluators receive data in a timely manner and that OMB clearance is received in a timely manner.
The evaluation schedule should be adjusted if there are delays.

TABLE II.1

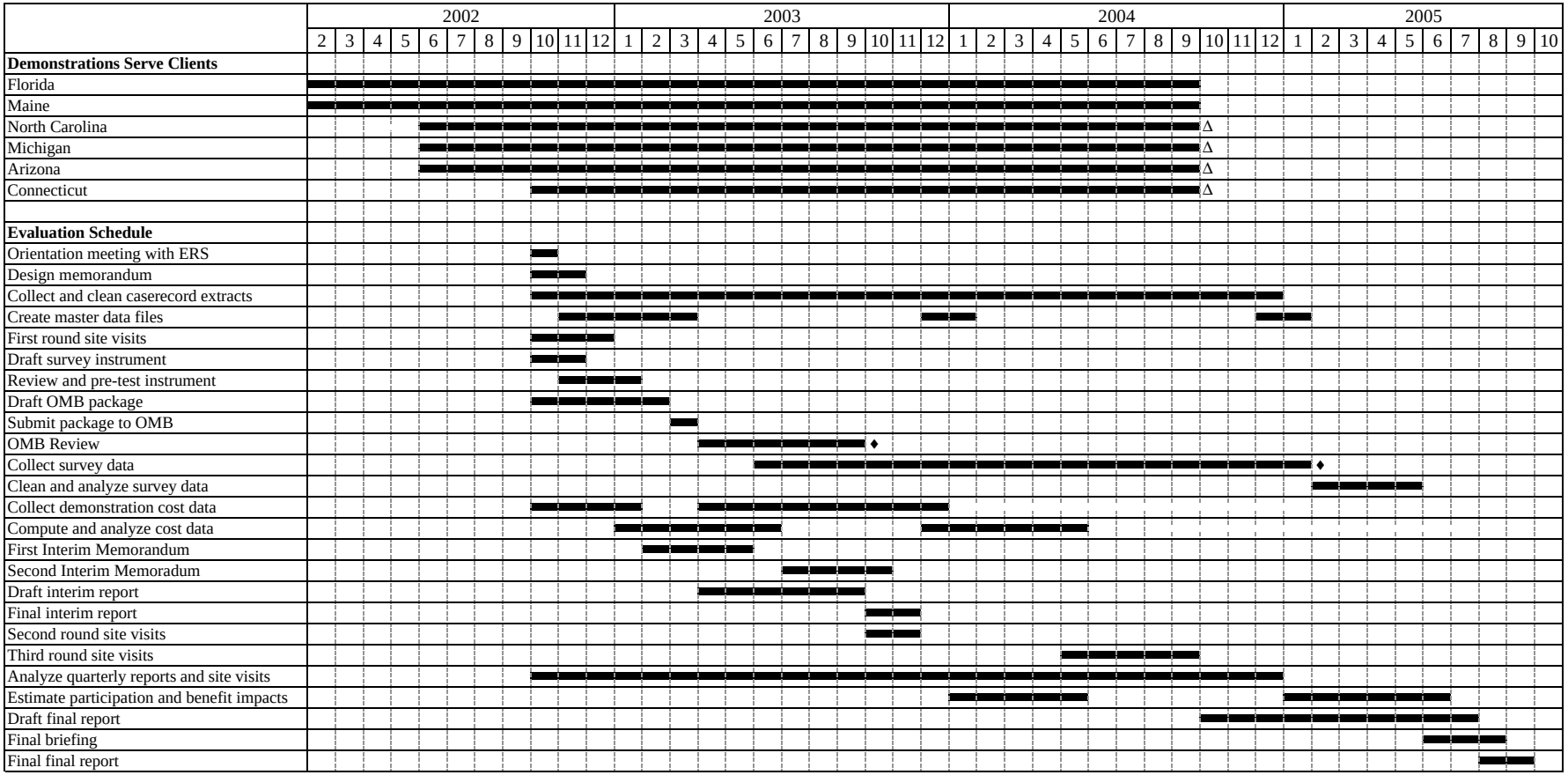
EVALUATION SCHEDULE

Item	Two-Year Grant	Grant Extension
Orientation meeting agenda	October 2002	October 2002
Orientation meeting	October 2002	October 2002
Design memorandum	November 2002	November 2002
Draft survey instrument	November 8, 2002	November 8, 2002
Site visits (first round)	December 2002	December 2002
Pre-test survey	Early January 2003	Early January 2003
Draft OMB package	February 2003	February 2003
OMB submission	March 2003	March 2003
Survey data collection (beginning of first quarter)	June - Sept 2003	June - Sept 2003
Draft First Interim Memorandum	May 2003	May 2003
Final First Interim Memorandum	June 2003	June 2003
Draft Second Interim Memorandum	October 2003	October 2003
Final Second Interim Memorandum	November 2003	November 2003
Draft Interim Report	n.a.	September 2003
Final Interim Report	n.a.	November 2003
Site visits (second round)	September 2003	November 2003
Focus groups	September 2003	November 2003
Site visits (third round)	n.a.	September 2004
Survey data collection (beginning of final quarter)	Nov 2003 - Jan 2004	Nov 2004 – Jan 2005
Draft Final Report	July 2004	July 2005
Final briefing	August 2004	August 2005
Final Final Report	September 2004	September 2005
Monthly Progress Reports		

NOTES: n.a means "not applicable." The two-year demonstration grant period ends in September 2003. The grants may be extended to permit each demonstration to serve clients for two years (so that the demonstrations end between February 2004 and September 2004) or all grants may be extended through September 2004. The schedule assumes that the evaluators receive data from the sites in a timely manner (as specified in Appendix B of the Evaluation Plan Report) and that OMB clearance is received in a timely manner. The evaluation schedule should be adjusted if there are delays in receiving OMB clearance or in receiving data from the demonstrations.

FIGURE II.2

ELDERLY NUTRITION DEMONSTRATION AND EVALUATION SCHEDULE
DEMONSTRATION GRANT EXTENDED UP TO ONE YEAR



ΔStart date for demonstrations in North Carolina, Michigan, Arizona, and Connecticut are uncertain (as of April 2002).
♦End of OMB review period and start of survey data collection are uncertain (as of April 2002). OMB review typically takes three to six months.

The schedule assumes that the evaluators receive data in a timely manner and that OMB clearance is received in a timely manner.
The evaluation schedule should be adjusted if there are delays.

A. IMPACT ON PARTICIPATION AND BENEFITS

A key measure of the success of the elderly nutrition pilot demonstrations will be their impact on FSP participation. The evaluators will need to determine how each demonstration affects the number of elderly that participate in the programs, and whether different demonstrations are effective at reaching different subgroups of elderly individuals. Additionally, the evaluators will need to determine whether the average benefit paid to elderly participants changes as individuals eligible for higher than or lower than average benefits are attracted to the demonstrations. By conducting consistent but separate evaluations for each demonstration, the evaluators then can determine which demonstration models have the largest impacts on elderly participation.

In the design report a pre-post comparison group methodology is developed for evaluating the impacts of the demonstrations on participation and benefits. For each demonstration site, we have identified a set of similar comparison sites. The patterns of elderly participation observed in the comparison sites will serve as a proxy for the participation patterns that would have happened in the demonstration site if the demonstration were never implemented. The evaluators will compare the participation patterns in the demonstration site over the course of the demonstration with the participation patterns in the comparison sites over the same period to generate an estimate of how the demonstrations affect elderly participation.

In designing the impact analysis, we had three overreaching objectives.

1. ***To ensure the impact estimates can be consistently derived across all sites.*** This will facilitate cross-site comparisons to determine whether the different demonstration models have different impacts.
2. ***To specify a rigorous sensitivity analysis of the findings.*** Since the impacts will be measured through a nonexperimental design, a host of comparisons will be used to improve confidence in the findings. This should allow evaluators to distinguish an impact from an anomaly.

3. ***To give the evaluators flexibility.*** Many of the factors that affect elderly participation may change over the course of the demonstrations. As a result, we cannot anticipate all of the issues the evaluators may need to explore. In identifying the data needed to conduct the impact evaluation, we specify extensive data files that will give the evaluators flexibility to explore ad hoc hypotheses. Since the data files are extracts of states' electronic caserecords, and since the burden of analyzing the data will fall on the evaluators, this additional flexibility should come at a minimal cost to most of the states participating in the demonstrations.

The remainder of this section summarizes how the evaluator will complete the data collection and analysis steps for the study's impact evaluation, as well as how findings will be reported.

1. Data Collection

For most demonstrations, the impact evaluation primarily will employ data state electronic administrative caserecords. In the states implementing commodities demonstrations, the evaluation also will employ data on commodity package contents obtained from site staff, as well as grocery store price scan data. A primary task of the impact evaluation will be to collect, clean and prepare data from these sources.

One of the first data collection steps that the evaluator should undertake is to enter into a formal agreement with the data managers from each state. In our evaluation design, we recommend that the evaluators draft memoranda of understanding (MOU) that clarify the respective roles of the state data managers and the evaluator. For instance, the MOUs should indicate the frequency and format of data extracts that the states will provide. They also should indicate that the burden of analysis will fall on the evaluator.

As described in detail in Appendix B of the design report, the state data extracts are intended to cover all individuals participating in the FSP in up to 10 separate observation months. The first observation month is seven months before the demonstration is implemented, and the remaining observation months occur every third month after that. The last observation month

will be September 2003 because it is the last month the demonstrations will serve clients.[4] All states with demonstrations active in September 2003 will be required to provide a data extract that month, regardless of the number of months since their previous extract. The total number of extracts a state provides will depend on the start date of the state's demonstration. States whose demonstrations start before April 2002 will be asked to provide 10 extracts, including one for September 2003; states that start in May 2002 or later will be asked to provide 9 or fewer extracts.

We recommend that the evaluators initially request from each site a data extract for only one quarter. In this manner, initial data checking and cleaning efforts can be focused on one extract per site. After the extract at each demonstration has been checked and data issues have been discussed with the data managers, the evaluators may request the remaining extracts.

Upon receiving each extract, the evaluator will need to thoroughly check and clean the data, as inconsistencies often exist on caserecord extracts.[5] To check the data, the evaluator should construct quality control computer programs that process the data extracts and identify inconsistencies. Because the format and content of these extracts will vary from state to state, separate quality control programs will be needed for each state. These programs should be run to check each new extract received by the evaluator. When inconsistencies arise, the evaluator will need to work with state data managers to identify the source of the inconsistency. If the problem occurred as part of the extract creation process, a timeline for creating a revised extract should be

[4]The demonstration grant period may be extended, in which case the last month could fall between February 2004 and September 2004. The evaluator will request that states provide extracts running through the last month of each demonstration.

[5]For example, data fields may be missing for a disproportionate number of records, one record may contain separate variables with conflicting information, or records for a particular geographic region may be missing or incomplete. Many other data problems may arise as well.

established. If these inconsistencies are not caused by the extract creation process, but are deficiencies in the data (such as missing observations), the evaluator should explore adjusting for these deficiencies through extrapolation and imputation.

Most of the work in acquiring and cleaning data will occur with the first data extract received from each state. At that time, the evaluator will need to become familiar with the structure of the data set and develop quality control and data cleaning programs. Subsequent data extracts will require less work, unless there are major changes in the file structure or significant new data inconsistencies that develop in later files.

Many problems may arise in collecting data. For instance, the documentation of state data extracts may be insufficient, and the evaluator will need to work closely with the state data mangers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data extracts. Additionally, the evaluator may need to delay analysis for some states if there are substantial delays in the release of the data extract, or they may need to drop certain components of the analysis if certain variables are unavailable or unreliable.

To facilitate analysis, the evaluator should consider constructing master data files that consolidate data from the individual caserecord extracts. For example, the evaluator may construct one master data file for each state containing all records for all observation months. Whatever the design, the final master data files all should share a consistent format, should have consistent variable names, and to the extent possible, should have consistent variable definitions. Initial master data files should be constructed after the first sets of data are received from all six sites. Since the evaluation will not begin until the Fall of 2002, the first sets of data extracts will include all of the observations for the pre-start up period and multiple observations for the post-start up period. We expect the initial master data files can be created by March 2003. These initial files will be used in conjunction with initial model specifications to ensure that all of the

necessary data elements have been received. The final master data files should be constructed after all data extracts have been submitted. We expect that this final file will be created in January 2004 (if the demonstrations end in September 2003).

An additional component of data collection will be to acquire the necessary data to compute the "comparable price" of the commodities packages. First, the evaluators will need to collect from commodity demonstration staff the type, quantity, weight/size and, where possible, brand of each item in the package. This information will be needed for every observation month for which the evaluators are collecting and analyzing FSP participation data. Next, the evaluators will acquire grocery store price scan data. These data are available from organizations such as Information Resources Incorporated (IRI) and A.C. Nielsen. Additionally, USDA's Economic Research Service has grocery store price data that was used for previous research, and it may be possible to use this file for this evaluation.

2. Data Analysis

Once the initial master data files have been constructed, the evaluator can specify the initial analysis models. These models, described in Chapter II of the design report, ultimately will be used to estimate impacts and conduct sensitivity analysis. Using the initial master data files, the evaluator should specify how to construct variables for the analytic models from the elements of the master data file. This specification process will allow the evaluator to identify any problems in data collection and/or model specification. To catch these problems early, we recommend that variable construction take place by June 2003, which is shortly after the initial master files are constructed.

In specifying the initial models, the evaluator should examine the comparison sites identified in the design report. Circumstances may have changed since the initial comparison site selection that make some comparison sites inappropriate. If one (or more) comparison site is no longer

appropriate, the evaluator should consider dropping that site from the comparison group. The evaluator then should specify the basic analysis model as well as all models used for the subgroup and sensitivity analyses.

It is unlikely that the models can be estimated on the initial master data file, as insufficient observations will exist. Rather, that file should be used to specify and construct the exogenous variables in the models. Model estimation can occur after the final master data files have been constructed in January 2004.

As part of the model specification process, the evaluator will need to specify the comparable price valuations for the commodities packages. Since grocery prices vary geographically, and since the price scan databases contain data from across the country, the first step will be to determine which geographic regions and/or grocery stores to use to value commodities for each demonstration site. Next, the evaluator will need to identify the appropriate grocery items in the price scan database to match against items in the commodities packages. If inexact matches exist (e.g., commodities participants receive a 1 lb bag of a good that is usually sold in 10 oz quantities), the evaluator will need to specify the best way to use grocery store price scan data to pro-rate the prices for those goods. Finally, if older price scan data are used in this analysis, the evaluator will need to specify how the prices should be adjusted to account for inflation.

3. Reporting Results

Findings from the impact analysis will appear in two interim memoranda and in the Final Report. The interim memoranda will provide ERS and FNS with preliminary results on the effects of the demonstrations on elderly FSP participation and benefits. Each memorandum will use data from three quarters before demonstration start-up and four quarters during the demonstration. The first memorandum will present preliminary findings for the two sites that started first—Florida and Maine. It will contain approximately 6 pages of text and 6 tables, and

a draft should be ready by May 2003. The second memorandum will present preliminary results for the three sites that are expected to start in June 2003—Arizona, Michigan, and North Carolina. A draft of the second memorandum should be ready by October 2003.

The findings presented in the interim memoranda should be considered preliminary, since they will not be based on all of the participation and benefits data and they will not undergo a rigorous sensitivity analysis. Findings based on all of the participation and benefits data and a sensitivity analysis will be presented in the Final Report

B. CLIENT SATISFACTION

The level of client satisfaction and awareness of the demonstrations will be measured with either a client satisfaction survey at the commodity alternative demonstration sites or with focus groups at all sites. Based on evaluation priorities and resources, ERS and FNS will determine which approach to use (or whether a combination of a survey at some sites and focus groups at some sites makes sense). If a survey is administered, the evaluators will collect data from a quarterly satisfaction survey with individuals from pure elderly households who completed an application during the previous quarter or who were recertified for food stamps.[6] Pending a decision by ERS and FNS on how to use evaluation resources for the client satisfaction analysis, focus groups may be conducted at the application assistance and simplified eligibility sites to capture the views and experiences of elderly people who start but do not complete an FSP application ("non-completers").

Based on the recommendation of ERS and FNS, the design does not include a survey of clients in comparison sites. The evaluators will not be able to conduct client satisfaction surveys

[6]At the application assistance sites, only elderly households that completed a food stamp application should be interviewed, because the application assistance pilots do not plan to help many elderly households that recertify for food stamps.

in the comparison sites because the comparison sites are not likely to agree to a survey in their service areas (or provide the data needed to draw the survey samples).

1. Preparing the Survey Instrument, Survey Sample, and OMB Submission

a. Survey Instrument

The survey will be administered by telephone. (Due to evaluation resource constraints, a mail follow-up will not be used for those who do not initially respond by telephone.) The survey will take 15 to 20 minutes to administer by telephone. We recommend that respondents who complete the telephone survey be paid $15. Proxies will be allowed for those sampled clients who appear to have cognitive difficulties. Because a large subgroup of elderly Spanish-speaking FSP participants lives in the Hartford area, the instrument will be translated into Spanish and available for use at all sites.

Since data will be collected with a telephone-only survey, we are assuming a 65 percent response rate. If, however, key staff from the alternative commodity sites educate their elderly clients about the survey and encourage them to participate in it, the participation rate could exceed 65 percent (and perhaps be closer to 70 percent). It will be important to for the sites to support the survey data collection effort, because we understand that OMB usually looks for a response rate of 75 percent or more when it reviews survey data collection proposals.

A draft of the survey instrument for each pilot can be developed from the survey topics listed in Table III.3 of the design report. By November 8, 2002, a draft of the survey instrument should be ready for review by the USDA and key staff at the commodity demonstration sites. After the evaluators revise the instrument in response to comments from ERS, FNS, and the demonstrations, the instrument will be pre-tested in early January, revised, and included in the OMB submission document.

b. Survey Sample Design

The sample design for the client satisfaction survey should be based on both the final size of the target population in each of the demonstration sites, desired precision levels, and available resources for conducting the survey.

Table II.2 provides estimates of the quarterly and yearly sampling frame counts. Based on these values and assuming a 65 percent response rate, we recommend conducting a census in North Carolina and using a sample of the target population in Connecticut.

c. Statistical Precision

For the client satisfaction survey, the resulting statistical precision in the estimates will depend first on whether a census was conducted for the site, and, if not, the sample allocation plan implemented. If a census of the target population is conducted in the demonstration site, the estimates obtained are not subject to sampling variability.

In Connecticut where a sample is proposed, the estimates will be subject to some level of sampling variability. Table II.3 provides some guidelines on the expected precision levels expressed as 95 percent confidence intervals for a 50 percent characteristic (a dichotomous characteristic evenly distributed across the population) for each demonstration site.[7] In an overall sample of 500 applicants, the study would yield respectable precision levels, for an overall 50 percent characteristic ranging from plus or minus 3.3 to 4.1 percentage points depending on the level of oversampling conducted. On the other hand, given the expected small population sizes, raising the sample sizes to 750 or 1,000 substantially improves the overall study

[7]See Section C of Chapter III in Sing et al. (2002) for a complete description of how the estimates in this table are derived.

TABLE II.2

ESTIMATED APPLICANTS BY SITE AND CENSUS
VS. SAMPLING RECOMMENDATIONS

Demonstration Site	Applicant Base	Estimated Quarterly Applications	Estimated Yearly Applicants	Current Sample Design	Target Completed Interviews (Four quarters)
Connecticut	Applicants and Recertifications	300	1,200	Sample	520
North Carolina	Applicants and Recertifications	125	500	**Census**	**325**
Total		425	1,700		825

TABLE II.3

EXPECTED PRECISION LEVELS BY SITE FOR VARIOUS DESIGN EFFECTS: OVERALL AND FOR SUBGROUP ESTIMATES

Site	Estimated Population Size	Sample Size	Option 1 No Oversampling (Design Effect =1.0)	Option 2 Minor Oversampling (Design Effect =1.1)	Option 3 Moderate Oversampling (Design Effect =1.3)
			95% Confidence Half Interval for 50 Percent Characteristic (Plus or Minus Percentage points)		
Connecticut	1,200	**For Overall Study Estimates**			
		1,000	1.3	1.3	1.4
		750	2.2	2.3	2.5
		500	3.3	3.5	3.8
		For Subgroups At Sample Size Indicated Assuming Overall Sample Size of 500			
		400	3.7	3.9	4.3
		300	4.3	4.5	4.9
		250	4.7	5.0	5.4
		200	5.3	5.6	6.0
		100	7.5	7.9	8.5

precision and would increase the sample sizes available for subgroup analysis, such as comparing satisfaction among those who selected the commodity option and those who did not select the commodity option.

d. OMB Submissions

We assume that approval from OMB will be required for the client survey and the focus groups with elderly FSP applicants and non-completers. The OMB submission document will include sections that describe the project, justify the need for the survey and focus groups, discuss confidentiality, estimate burden to respondents, discuss response rates, and present procedures for collecting information. The document will also include a data collection schedule and the data collection instruments. We expect that a draft of the OMB package can be submitted to the USDA as early as February 2003. After review by ERS and FNS, we expect the OMB package can be submitted to OMB in March 2003.

OMB review can take anywhere from two months to six months or more. Table II.1 assumes that OMB approval will occur in three months (by June 2003), since many previous submissions by the USDA to OMB have been approved within three months. However, if OMB review takes more than three months, the evaluation schedule should be adjusted accordingly. As a result, if the demonstrations end in September 2003, the survey may only interview elderly FSP applicants during two calendar quarters.

2. Preparing to Administer the Surveys

Survey administration should begin as soon as OMB approves the survey, the evaluators obtain a survey contact database for the most recent quarter, and the evaluators send sample members an advance letter that describes the survey. The earliest realistic date for survey data collection to begin is June 2003; it will be later if OMB approval takes more than three months.

a. Survey Contact Database

During every quarter of the demonstration, each demonstration site for which survey data will be collected should prepare a file that contains data that the evaluators will use to draw the sample and contact sample members for the survey. The file (or "sampling frame") will list all completed food stamp applications and recertifications from pure elderly households in Connecticut and North Carolina during each quarter. It will include case identification numbers so that survey data can be linked to MIS data. Within the first few months of the evaluation, the evaluators should specify the contents of the survey contact database, sign memoranda of agreement with data managers in each state, and submit a formal request for the data. (These efforts should be coordinated with data request for the state case record extracts needed to conduct the participation impact analysis.) Draft specifications for the survey contact database appear in Appendix B of the design report.

b. Advance Letters to Clients

An advance letter to prospective survey respondents that describes the survey should be drafted and reviewed by the USDA and each site before OMB approval is obtained. A separate advance letter will be used for each site. At each site, the advance letters should be signed by a representative from the local, regional, or state food stamp office or a representative from the grantee's nonprofit partner. The letter should assure clients that their participation in the survey is voluntary, and that their responses (if they participate) will be confidential, and that eligible households will be paid for participating in the survey.

3. Administering the Survey

Once OMB approval is obtained, we recommend administering the survey every quarter with recent applicants. So, for example, if the first round of survey data collection would begin

in June 2003 at each site, the next two rounds of interviews would begin in September 2003 and December 2003. For each quarterly data collection period, a new sample will be drawn of elderly clients who recently completed an FSP application.[8] Survey respondents will be asked to recall very recent experiences with the pilot, and their responses will be more accurate and detailed as a result. The evaluators will also be more likely to receive accurate telephone numbers and addresses for the survey respondents if data are provided shortly after the respondents' applications or recertifications are received.

4. Focus Groups

Due to evaluation resource constraints, ERS and FNS may decide to assess client satisfaction with focus groups at all sites instead of with a client survey. These focus groups would be conducted with elderly applicants at all sites and with elderly people who recertify at the commodity alternative and simplified eligibility sites. In addition, the evaluators will conduct focus groups with elderly households in Arizona, Florida, Maine, and Michigan that started but did not complete an FSP application.

The focus groups can be conducted during the same week, if possible, in which the evaluators are conducting their second round of site visits for the process analysis (September or November 2003, depending on whether the demonstrations end in September 2003 or are extended beyond September 2003). By this time, OMB clearance should be obtained and the evaluators should have requested and received lists from the pilots of households that applied/recertified and that started but did not complete an application.

[8]Clients who are selected for two different samples—such as for the June 2003 and December 2003 samples in the example above—will be interviewed once.

5. Data Analysis and Reporting Results

After the survey data have been collected, they should be cleaned and reviewed. Next, the evaluators should prepare separate survey weights for each commodity alternative pilot to account for differences in the selection probabilities of various applicant types and for potential differences between the profile of respondents and the target population that could result from survey nonresponse. These weights can be adjusted to account differences in the response patterns across the characteristics of the sampled members. With this approach, the weights would provide for unbiased estimation from the sample for means, totals and percentages.

The survey data will be analyzed using univariate and multivariate techniques. A qualitative analysis will conducted with data from the focus groups. Findings will be reported in the project's Draft Final Report.[9]

6. Anticipated Issues or Difficulties

There are three primary issues pertaining to the analysis of client satisfaction:

- ***If ERS and FNS decide to assess client satisfaction with a survey at the commodity alternative sites, additional data on client satisfaction can be collected through a survey or focus groups at one additional site, subject to the availability of evaluation funds and to the evaluation priorities of ERS and FNS.*** Once the high start-up costs of administering a survey (such as preparing and programming the instrument and preparing the OMB clearance package) are incurred, the marginal costs of collecting data through a survey are relatively low. If sufficient evaluation funds are available, and if ERS and FNS would like to learn more about client satisfaction, a survey or some focus groups could be conducted at an additional site.

- ***If ERS and FNS decide to conduct a survey at the commodity alternative sites and additional resources are available for this analysis, including a mail follow-up to the survey will yield a higher response rate.*** With a telephone-only survey and

[9]If the demonstrations are extended, we recommend that the evaluators prepare an Interim Report (see Table II.1). Findings from the survey analysis will not be included in the Interim Report because the Interim Report is due at approximately the same time that the first quarter of survey data will be collected.

respondent payments of $15, we assume a 65 percent response rate. This response rate may exceed 65 percent if key staff at the demonstration sites educate their elderly clients about the survey and encourage them to participate in it. The response rate could reach 75 percent if there is also a mail follow-up. However, there are significant costs to including a mail follow-up to a telephone survey for an elderly population.

- ***The evaluators will not be able to collect data on client satisfaction during the first 3 to 11 months of demonstration operations (depending on the site)***. Although the demonstrations will serve clients for 12 to 20 months (if the demonstrations end in September 2003), survey data will be collected for clients who applied/recertified during the last 9 months of each demonstration. Survey data collection will begin towards the end of the two-year demonstration grant period because the evaluation will begin more than one year after the demonstration grants were awarded, and the evaluators will need at least nine months to develop the survey instrument, revise the instrument in response to comments, pre-test it, prepare the OMB submission, and wait for OMB approval. Consequently, there will be no survey data on client satisfaction from elderly households who were served by the demonstrations during their first 3 to 11 months of operations (depending on the site).

C. QUANTIFYING COSTS

The demonstrations will generate new costs for the federal government, state and local FSP offices, and demonstration partners. The specifications for reporting these costs must identify all the important components of costs that can be quantified, such as the costs of demonstration design, staff training, publicity, changes in the administrative costs of the FSP, and changes in food stamp benefits due to the demonstrations. The costs of volunteer time should also be estimated. The objective of the cost analysis is to quantify, to the extent possible, the Federal, State, and local administrative costs of the demonstrations.

1. Data Collection Methods

a. Federal FSP Costs

To quantify the effect of the demonstrations on the federal FSP program, the evaluators will need to measure (1) the change in the amount of FSP benefits paid due to the demonstration and (2) 50 percent of the state and local FSP's costs of administering the demonstration. To measure

the change in the amount of FSP benefits paid, the evaluators will collect and analyze data from the Quarterly Reports submitted by the demonstrations. Specifically, they will collect data on the monthly number of elderly households that participated in the FSP in the pilot and comparison areas, and the monthly total amount of FSP benefits issued to elderly households in the pilot and comparison areas. These data can be analyzed and presented in a manner similar to Table IV.1 in the design report. The approach to measuring the cost to state and local FSP offices of administering the demonstration is described below.

b. Costs Incurred by Demonstration Partners and State and Local FSP Offices

We recommend collecting data on the costs incurred by demonstration partners and state and local FSP offices through discussions with demonstration staff about the use of staff and other resources in implementing and operating the demonstrations. The discussions would use protocols for examining how staff time is used and how much time is required for various demonstration-related activities. This approach, sometimes referred to as the "building-up" cost estimation approach (see Ohls and Rosenberg 1999), will help ensure consistency across all sites in the way costs are measured and will make it possible to include all relevant costs.

These discussions should be supplemented with data on costs obtained from the sites' quarterly reports to USDA as well as through a set of cost worksheets completed by demonstration staff. The cost worksheets will be developed by the evaluator and should request detailed information about demonstration cost components and include instructions for filling out the worksheets.

If possible, the discussions about demonstration costs should occur in-person, during the first and second site visits. (Discussions that cannot be conducted in-person may be conducted over the telephone.) During the first visit to each site, the evaluators can collect data on the costs

of demonstration implementation. During the second visit to each site, data on the ongoing costs of the demonstrations can be collected.[10]

Data on the ongoing costs of the demonstration should be collected at least nine months after the demonstrations have been operating. This gives demonstration staff an adequate amount of experience under the demonstration to estimate the amount of time staff typically spend during a day, week, or month on demonstration-related activities. If for example, the evaluators have an estimate of the number of hours all the demonstration application assistants in a particular site spend per week, on average, helping elderly clients under the demonstration, the evaluators can multiple the weekly average by the number of assistants and number of weeks under the demonstration to obtain an estimate of the total amount of time the assistants spent helping clients. This total amount of time would be multiplied by an hourly rate, fringe benefit amount, and overhead amount (if appropriate) to compute the total costs for that activity.

After the discussions, the evaluators should carefully review the cost worksheets to ensure completeness and consistency and follow up with the respondents as needed.

2. Data Analysis and Reporting

When the data elements from the cost worksheets are complete and internally consistent, the data can be entered into an Excel spreadsheet template to compute the desired unit costs by component. Estimates of the costs of implementing the demonstrations can be presented in the Interim Report (if the demonstrations end in September 2004). All cost estimates will be presented in the Final Report.

[10]Data on the on-going demonstration costs for Florida and Maine may be collected during the first site visit, since these demonstrations began in February 2002.

3. Anticipated Issues or Difficulties

There are two primary issues that the evaluators need to address with respect to quantifying the costs of the demonstrations. First, they will need to carefully explain their approach for estimating the value of volunteer labor, which will be an important component of the costs of the commodity alternative demonstrations. Several different hourly rates for volunteer labor can be used, and the evaluators may decide to estimate the costs of volunteer labor using two or more of these approaches. For example, volunteer labor can be valued at (1) the minimum wage, (2) the wage of laborers in the private sector doing comparable work, (3) the wage that the volunteer(s) receive through their own employment (for those who are employed), or (4) zero dollars.

Second, the evaluators will be collecting data on the implementation costs for Florida and Maine approximately nine months after these sites began serving clients. It is possible that some of the key demonstration staff may not remember in detail in November 2002 (the data collection month) the amount of time they spent performing demonstration-related activities between August 2001 and February 2002 (the months during which they implemented their demonstration).

D. DEMONSTRATION IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTS ON STAKEHOLDERS

A process analysis will be conducted to describe the implementation experiences of the demonstrations and to examine the effects of the demonstrations on stakeholders such as the food stamp offices, nonprofit demonstration partners, and organizations that provide food assistance to low-income elderly people. The evaluators will collect data through continuous monitoring (quarterly telephone conversations with a few key demonstration staff), annual in-person site visits, and review of the Quarterly Reports submitted by the demonstrations.

1. Quarterly Reports, Continuous Monitoring, and Site Visit Preparations

During the first month of the evaluation, which we assume is October 2002, the evaluators should review all Quarterly Reports submitted by each demonstration, initiate the quarterly telephone conversations with key demonstration staff, prepare a list of topics for each site visit for review by ERS and FNS, and schedule site visits for November and early December. The quarterly telephone conversations provide an opportunity for the evaluators to follow-up on issues presented in the demonstrations' Quarterly Reports. At minimum, the evaluators should speak with someone from the food stamp office who oversees the demonstration and someone from a demonstration partner who oversees demonstration operations. If the Quarterly Reports are written in sufficient detail and submitted on time, the quarterly telephone conversations will probably be brief.

2. Site Visits and Focus Groups

Each site visit should be conducted by one of the study's principal investigators and a research analyst. With a two-person site visit team, the evaluators are more likely to collect accurate notes and to ensure that all research questions are addressed. The site visit team should ensure that all the research questions specified in Tables V.1 through V.6 in the evaluation design report and in the list of site visit topics are addressed either through the Quarterly Reports, quarterly telephone conversations, or site visits.

a. First Round of Site Visits

The first round of site visits should be scheduled for November and December of 2002. They should focus on collecting data on the implementation experiences of each site. In addition, the site visit team can collect data on the costs of implementing each demonstration (as described in Section C above). For Florida and Maine, the evaluators also have the option of

collecting data on the on-going costs of serving clients in the demonstration. (The remaining sites will not have served clients long enough to collect data on on-going costs during the first site visit.)

b. Focus Groups and Second and Third Rounds of Site Visits

A second and final site visit will be conducted at each site in August or September 2003 if the demonstrations end in September 2003. If each demonstration is extended for an additional year (through September 2004), we recommend a second site visit to each pilot in October-November 2003 and a final site visit to each pilot during the last month of the demonstration. If each demonstration is extended to permit them to serve clients for two years, we recommend one additional ("final") site visit to Maine and Florida (which would end during February 2004) and two additional site visits (a second round site visit and a "final" site visit) to Arizona, Connecticut, Maine, and Michigan. For the latter four sites, the second round of site visits would occur during the fall or 2003, and the final site visit would occur during their final month of operation (which is currently expected to be June 2004).

During the second site visit, the evaluators will focus on collecting data on the effects of the demonstration on stakeholders. While the evaluators are visiting each site, they can also conduct focus groups to assess client satisfaction at that site (if ERS and FNS decide to use focus groups for this analysis). One evaluator will facilitate the discussion, and the other evaluator will observe, take notes, and handle the logistics (such as tape recording). At the end of each session, each respondent will be given a cash honorarium for participating.

Due to evaluation resource constraints and research priorities at ERS and FNS, there will be no focus group discussions with alternative food service providers. To examine the effects of the demonstrations on alternative food assistance providers, the evaluators will speak with representatives of these providers on the telephone or in person during the site visits.

3. Analysis and Reporting Results

It is critical that the data for the process analysis, which will be collected through different strategies and from different sources, be analyzed as a whole. Thus, the data analysis should triangulate sources and perspectives by using data from multiple sources to validate findings. To aid the evaluators in data analysis, we recommend use of a qualitative software package such as Atlas.ti to store, code, and analyze the data. Qualitative data management and analysis software packages can be used to systematically code notes from discussions with stakeholders, and queries of the database can be used to help formulate conclusions.

Findings on the implementation experiences of the demonstrations will be reported in the Interim Report. An Interim Report will be submitted only if the demonstrations are extended beyond September 2003. Findings on the implementation experiences and the effects of the demonstrations on stakeholders will be reported in the Final Report.

4. Issues for the Evaluation

A major difficulty for the process analysis will be collecting complete data on the implementation experiences of each demonstration because in most cases, the data will be collected up to nine months later than the optimal data collection period. Ideally, a site visit that collects data on a demonstration's implementation experiences should occur within a month or two after the demonstration begins serving clients. For Florida and Maine, which began serving clients in February 2002, it would have been ideal to conduct a site visit in February 2002, when key demonstration staff are able to describe in detail their recent implementation experiences and the issues they tackled. Instead, these site visits will probably occur in November 2002, which is nine months later. Although demonstration staff in Florida and Maine can record their implementation experiences in their Quarterly Reports to FNS, these reports may not yield the detail and the follow-up discussion that a site visit in February 2002 would yield. Three of the

sites—North Carolina, Michigan, and Arizona—anticipate that they will start serving clients by June 2002 (although this start date may slip by a few months). Only Connecticut anticipates starting at the same time that the evaluation starts.

E. MEETINGS, DESIGN MEMORANDUM, AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Within the first month of the evaluation, if possible, the evaluators should schedule an orientation meeting with ERS. During this meeting, ERS and the evaluators can discuss the evaluation objectives and key changes since the evaluation design report was written. After the orientation meeting, the evaluators will prepare a brief design memorandum that documents changes in the evaluation design since the design report was written and summarizes decisions made during the orientation meeting.

Every month the evaluators should prepare a monthly progress report to ERS that describes project activities conducted during the previous month, discusses activities anticipated for the following month, and discusses problems encountered (if any).

The evaluators will conduct a final briefing with ERS and FNS after the Draft Final Report has been submitted. This briefing will present findings from the evaluation.